

Press Release (August 17, 2017)

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Statement by Habitat CEO Jonathan Reckford on the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia

Last Saturday morning, as white nationalists gathered for their march of hate in Charlottesville, a very different group of people were gathering less than a mile away. On that city's Charlton Avenue, members of seven local churches had joined together to lay the floor trusses on the foundation of the community's newest Habitat home.

Those Habitat volunteers—and thousands more working that same morning across the country and world—had come together to share a vision starkly different than those who seek to divide us. Our vision is one that is welcoming to all. Our vision embraces diverse views. Our vision knows that no matter who we are or where we come from, we all deserve to have a decent life. Our vision says that every one of us deserves the opportunity for a better future.

As the forces of hate converged on Charlottesville's Emancipation Park to tear us apart, Habitat's spirit of inclusivity and understanding were working to bring us together.

The racism, bigotry and violence on display sickened and saddened me. I know I join the Habitat community in rejecting that hate, because those actions and voices run counter to everything we believe. As a Christian organization that welcomes people of all faiths and no faith, inclusivity is who we are. It's what makes us a strong community, and it's those same values that make us a strong nation.

As a lifelong Christian, I want to be clear: the white nationalists, neo-Nazis, KKK and their supporters who descended on Charlottesville have rejected the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Habitat for Humanity stands firmly against their words, actions and any suggestion that theirs is a legitimate grievance. We applaud and honor those who put their own well-being at risk to reject this hatred. We share in the nation's grief in the tragic loss of Heather Heyer, whose life was taken while she was standing to protect others. We mourn for Lieutenant H. Jay Cullen III and Trooper-Pilot Berke M. M. Bates, who lost their lives while protecting and serving their community.

The hate-motivated acts we saw this weekend do not define us as Americans, or as citizens of the world. And they don't define Charlottesville either.

Because even while that city grieves, there are forces of love hard at work. Later today, Habitat for Humanity of Greater Charlottesville will break ground on a community of affordable housing that will give 14 families the opportunity for a better future. Dan Rosensweig, the CEO of this affiliate, shares these words:

We don't have answers as to why the kinds of evil and hatred experienced in Charlottesville this week exist in the world, but we do know these three things: People who are swinging a hammer are not swinging a stick or a flag pole. When we are given the opportunity to work side by side with someone from a different background, we inevitably replace fear with a shared sense of purpose and humanity. And when we commit to listening without judgment, we all inspire people to be guided by their better angels.

Dan is right. Every nail hammered, every wall raised, is a rejection of hate and a step toward the future where everyone—irrespective of class, color or creed—has a decent life.

About Habitat for Humanity

Driven by the vision that everyone needs a decent place to live, Habitat for Humanity began in 1976 as a grassroots effort on a community farm in southern Georgia. The Christian housing organization has since grown to become a leading global nonprofit working in more than 1,300 communities throughout the U.S. and in more than 70 countries. Families and individuals in need of a hand up partner with Habitat for Humanity to build or improve a place they can call home. Habitat homeowners help build their own homes alongside volunteers and pay an affordable mortgage. Through financial support, volunteering or adding a voice to support affordable housing, everyone can help families achieve the strength, stability and self-reliance they need to build better lives for themselves. Through shelter, we empower. To learn more, visit [habitat.org](https://www.habitat.org).
